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ABSTRACT

This report on comic books, designed to overcome sex stereotyping in elementary school children by exposing them to new role models, includes: (1) a discussion of sex-role learning, stereotyped sex-role characteristics, and comic books; (2) summaries of the story lines of three comic books developed to depict new role models; (3) a black and white copy of the comic book drawings and captions for the three stories; (4) a copy of a teacher's guide and lesson plans for discussion of the three comics; and (5) an anecdotal report of a field test of the comics with a fifth grade classroom. (Author/SS)

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THE SEX EQUITY PAMPHLET

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Institute for Research and Development
in Occupational Education
Center for Advanced Study in Education
The Graduate School and University Center
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THE SEX EQUITY PAMPHLET
(Superperson Comic Book)

Final Report

Deanna Chitayat, Ph.D.

The Sex Equity Pamphlet was developed under Vocational Education Act grant from the New York State Education Department. The purpose of the pamphlet, which was subsequently titled The Superperson Comic Book, was to overcome sex stereotyping in elementary school children by exposing them to new role models in a cartoon format.

These materials are aimed at grades Four and Five, since evidence has shown that efforts to reduce sex stereotyping should occur before adolescence. Comic books are a popular educational tool that could be used to reduce sex-stereotyping. Finally, current comic books have exposed children to sex-stereotyped situations and characters.

Through role models at home, in school, on television; in books, in fairytales, etc., the child is innundated with the concept that girls are supposed to be nurturant, responsible and obedient, whereas boys are supposed to be self-reliant and achievement-oriented. Children imitate sex-appropriate behavior until that behavior becomes a fixed part of their personality.

The "sex-appropriate" characteristics that society imposes on young children has implications for their future career decision making. The traditional career choices for women have been in those occupations which are associated with a high level of nurturance, obedience and responsibility, e.g., nursing, elementary school teaching, secretarial science, etc. In contrast, males have avoided these occupations which require characteristics that society has taught them belong primarily to females. If we are concerned about the sex-stereotyped career choices

made by young people, then we must reach the child before their modeling and acceptance of certain stereotyped sex-role characteristics becomes fixed.

Obviously, the best formats for exposing children to non-sex-stereotyped concepts and role models are the ones children choose when they are given the option. Comic books have been favored reading material for many generations of children. Comic book sales to children were 3,600,000 last year, according to Bill Morse, of Village Comic Art. The comic book format can transmit the message that males and females should not restrict the development of traits, nor restrict career decisions on the basis of sex.

Comic Books and Sex-Stereotyping

Currently, most comic books exacerbate the problem of sex-stereotyping rather than reducing it. Nilsen and Tyler have reviewed educational materials for the Women's Educational Equity Act Program. Their findings for educational materials closely parallels our own evaluation of the most popular comic books (Spidey, Richie Rich, Archie, etc.):

- Male characters are shown in the majority of leadership and decision-making roles.
- Body language of female characters implies dependence and submissiveness.
- Literature includes numerous references to "foolish old women," "old wives' tales," and "silly girls."
- Women and girls seem to be helpless in times of danger, needing a man to help them or comfort them.
- Much descriptive language emphasizes women's "frailty" and dependence (clinging vine, shrinking violet, little women) and men's strength (take it like a man, man-sized job).

- Men and boys are portrayed in a much narrower range of emotions than girls.
- Girls, but rarely boys, are shown being frightened, scared, and cowardly.
- Cartoons and humorbooks emphasize females' supposed fear of mice and other rodents.
- Women and girls are more often engaged in quiet, indoor activities; men and boys are portrayed in active, outdoor activities. Girls appreciate, watch, wait, and participate passively. Boys produce, solve, and build.
- Pastel or pale colors often signify girls and women; vibrant and strong colors signify boys and men.
- Appearance, grooming, and clothing (attributes necessary to "attract" a man) are emphasized for girls and women. Women are pictured housecleaning in heels; girls, playing in party clothes.
- Pictures of women are often included solely as decorations or as "sex objects."
- Pictures in books show mothers taking care of children much more often than they show fathers taking care of children. Men are rarely included in illustrations of the activities of the home. They are rarely pictured as nurturers.
- In animal fantasies, female characters are shown in the roles of mother, teacher, librarian, secretary, and nurse. Feminine pronouns are used only to designate mothers and other female sex-stereotyped roles.
- Even young girls are often portrayed as cleaning up for and looking after boys.

Because of the popularity of comic books, they can have an enormous impact on the attitudes and values of an entire generation of children. Unfortunately, the values that are being transmitted are sex-stereotyped. Moreover, the sex-stereotyping in comic books occurs in the most blatant and exaggerated forms because this is in the nature of the cartoon art form. One non-sex-stereotyped comic book may be a "drop in the bucket"; insufficient, perhaps, to hold back the tide, but a beginning must be made!

The project produced a 16-page color comic book and teachers' guide designed to reduce sex-stereotyping in children. Three stories, overtly and covertly, deliver the following messages:

- Females as well as males have exciting adventures.
- Females as well as males engage in rugged activity.
- Both men and women love to take care of children, although some men and women have other interests, too.
- Women are brave and self-reliant.
- Women have many skills, including scientific and mechanical skills.
- The action of women, as well as men, have a direct effect on situation outcomes.
- Men gain great satisfaction in working with children.
- Females as well as males succeed as carpenters, electricians, and automechanics.

Story Summaries

1. May the Best Person Win. A girl, Maria, is ridiculed when she enters a soap box derby with all male contestants. An accident occurs during the race and one of the drivers is pinned under a heavy beam. Maria saves the boy by rigging up a block and tackle.

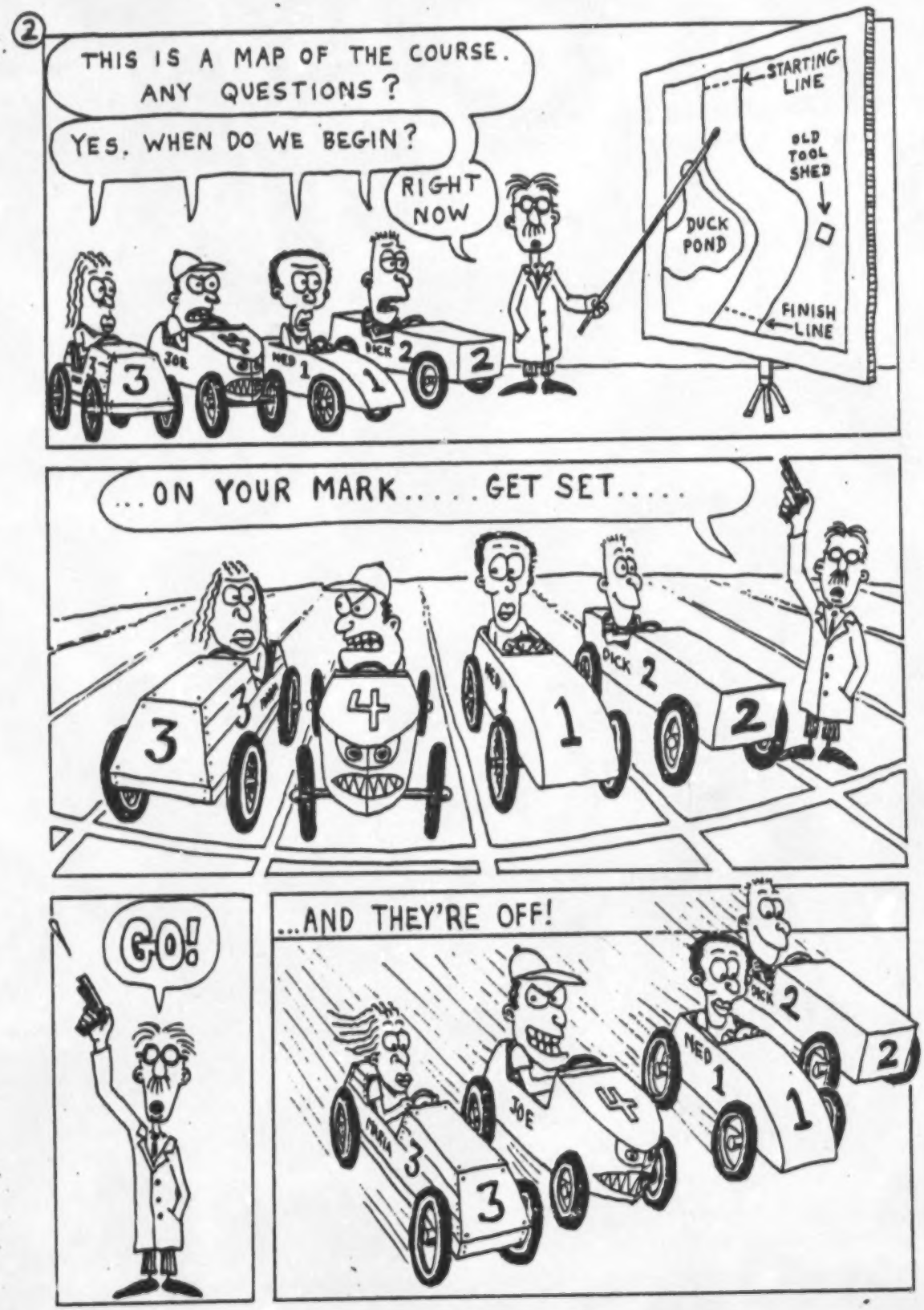
2. Jane and the Beanstalk. Jane seeks to help her family by taking a job doing heavy farm work. She accomplishes her tasks using simple machines. At the farm she finds a weed which she plants at home. She climbs the miraculously fast-growing beansprout, and meets the evil giant who ridicules the girl giant-killer. Jane outwits the giant and saves Jack (the original "giant-killer").

3. The Futura Family. Billy's mother and father each yearn to take over the other's job. When they finally do exchange jobs (Mother becomes an automechanic, Father becomes a homemaker), they are thrilled

with their new roles. Their son, Billy, responds to his classmates' taunts by reminding them that his family is a happy family.

The comics were submitted to an advisory council and revised according to their recommendations. The initial stories had attempted to deliver the sex-equity messages covertly. The final stories present the messages directly. The comics were submitted to a group of 5th grade students and revised to accommodate the reading level of this group (see Appendix). On the following pages is a black and white version of the three stories. The discussion guide is on page 22.

MAY THE BEST PERSON WIN
1
HI SIS. WHAT'S UP?
HI GREG. I'M GETTING READY FOR THE HILLSVILLE SOAP BOX DERBY!
WAM! WAM! WAM!
MARIA
3
THOSE BOYS WILL BE HARD TO BEAT
I KNOW. THEY THINK GIRLS CAN'T RACE BUT I'LL SHOW 'EM!
LATER, AT THE RACE...
HEY MARIA! I HOPE YOU WON'T CRY WHEN YOU LOSE!
HA HA HA HA HA
HA HA HA
JOE
IF ANYONE CRIES, IT WILL BE YOU CLOWNS AFTER I WIN!
ALL RACERS PLEASE REPORT TO THE STARTING LINE!
WE'LL SEE WHO THE REAL CLOWN IS, GIRLIE!


2
THIS IS A MAP OF THE COURSE. ANY QUESTIONS?
YES. WHEN DO WE BEGIN?
RIGHT NOW
STARTING LINE
OLD TOOL SHED
DUCK POND
FINISH LINE
...ON YOUR MARK.....GET SET.....
GO!
...AND THEY'RE OFF!

...AS THEY PASS THE DUCK POND, JOE TAKES THE LEAD!

QUACK QUACK

YA HA!

BUT IT LOOKS LIKE HE'S HAVING TROUBLE!

3

MY STEERING WHEEL BROKE!

JOE

HE'S HEADING STRAIGHT FOR THE OLD TOOL SHED!

AAAAAAH!

CRASH!

THE OTHER RACERS QUICKLY COME TO THE RESCUE...

EEEERK!

EEEERK!

HEY JOE! ARE YOU OKAY?

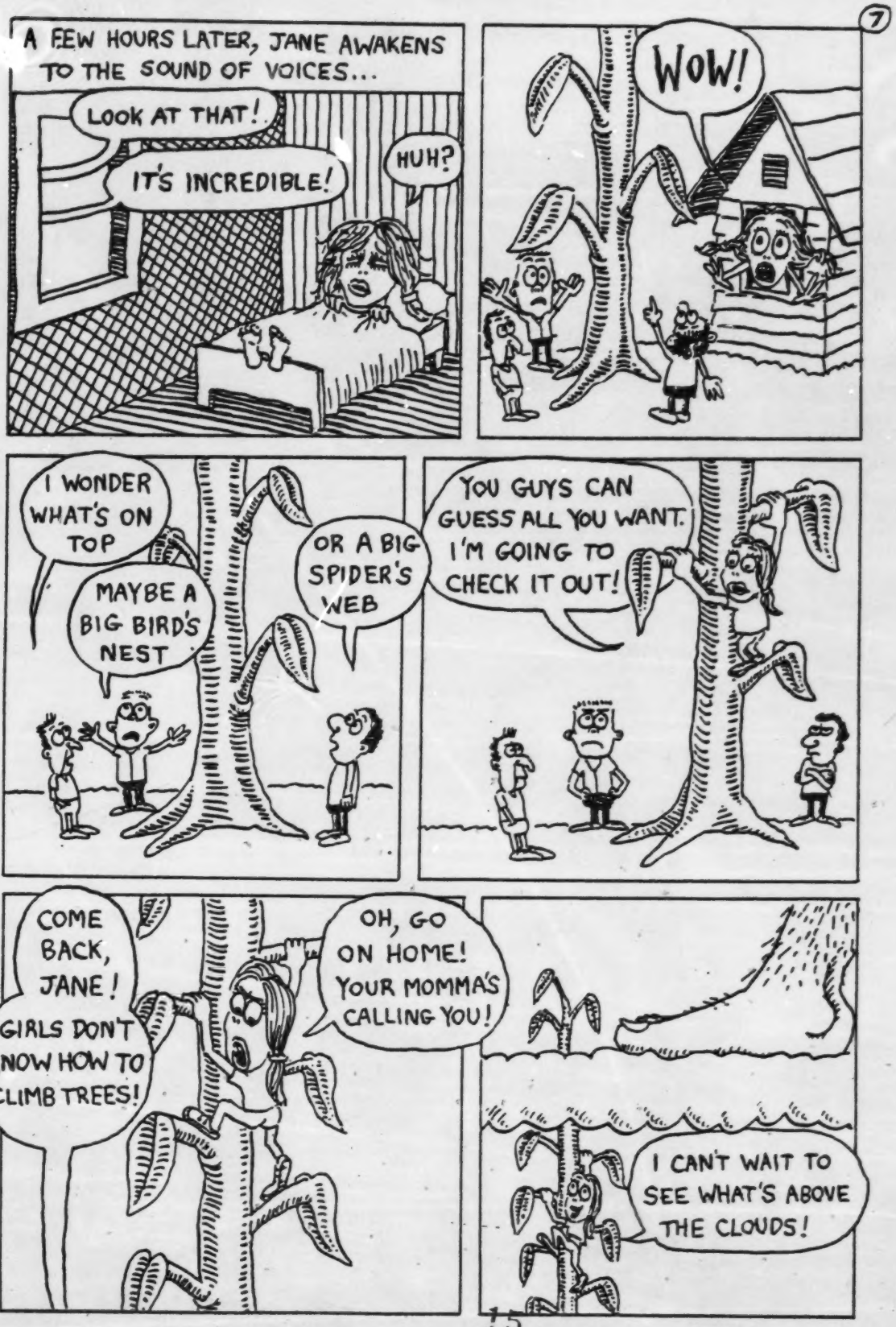
YEAH, BUT I'M TRAPPED!

4
THIS BEAM IS TOO HEAVY!
JUST GET ME OUT OF HERE!
I'LL BE RIGHT BACK!
BUT...BUT...BUT...
THIS BLOCK AND TACKLE WILL MAKE IT EASY TO LIFT THAT HEAVY BEAM
?
I'M FREE!
YOU WERE RIGHT! THAT WAS EASY!
JOE
UH, THANKS FOR SAVING MY LIFE
DON'T MENTION IT
JOE
BUT WHAT ABOUT THE RACE?
WE DON'T HAVE A WINNER OF THE RACE...
...BUT WE SURE DO HAVE A WINNER!
1st Prize
JOE

5
JANE AND THE BEANSTALK
BILLS! BILLS! BILLS! WHEN WILL IT END?!
INFLATION IS KILLING US!
IN
OUT
I WONDER HOW I CAN HELP MOM AND DAD MAKE ENDS MEET.
I'VE GOT IT!
I'LL GET A JOB!
SORRY, JANE. I ONLY HIRE BOYS TO CLEAR THE FIELDS FOR PLANTING.
BUT MR. SMITH! JUST GIVE ME A CHANCE!
HELP WANTED
IT'S HARD WORK, JANE. DON'T SAY I DIDN'T WARN YOU.
THANKS, MR. SMITH.

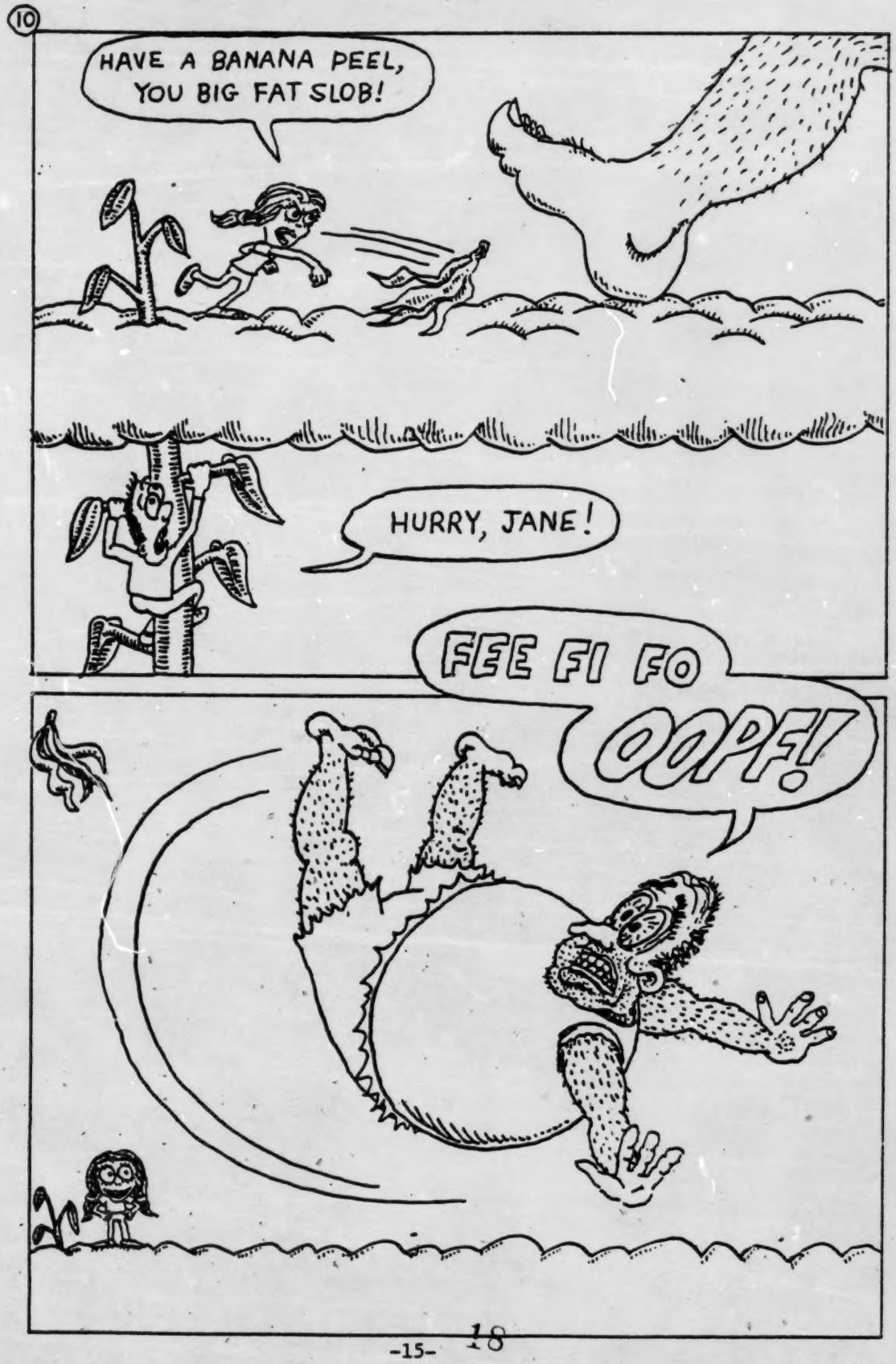
6

THIS LEVER HELPS LOOSEN BIG BOULDERS!
AND THIS INCLINED PLANE MAKES IT EASY TO LIFT THEM ONTO THE TRUCK!
YOU DID A REALLY GOOD JOB, JANE!
THANKS, MR. SMITH
NOW THAT ALL THE ROCKS ARE OUT, TOMORROW WE'LL PLOW OUT ALL THESE WEEDS
YOU MEAN ALL THESE PLANTS ARE WEEDS?
OF COURSE! WHY DO YOU ASK?
I LIKE THIS ONE. CAN I TAKE IT HOME?
SURE!
HEH HEH. THAT SILLY GIRL FELL IN LOVE WITH A WEED!
I'LL TAKE GOOD CARE OF YOU, BUT RIGHT NOW I NEED SOME SLEEP


A FEW HOURS LATER, JANE AWAKENS TO THE SOUND OF VOICES...
LOOK AT THAT!
IT'S INCREDIBLE!
HUH?
7
WOW!
I WONDER WHAT'S ON TOP
MAYBE A BIG BIRD'S NEST
OR A BIG SPIDER'S WEB
YOU GUYS CAN GUESS ALL YOU WANT. I'M GOING TO CHECK IT OUT!
COME BACK, JANE!
GIRLS DON'T KNOW HOW TO CLIMB TREES!
OH, GO ON HOME! YOUR MOMMA'S CALLING YOU!
I CAN'T WAIT TO SEE WHAT'S ABOVE THE CLOUDS!

8
BUT FIRST I NEED A REST
FEE FI FO FEET!
I SMELL SOMETHING SMALL AND GOOD TO EAT!
SNIF
HA HA HA! NOW THEY'RE SENDING GIRL GIANT KILLERS!
AND WHAT'S THAT SUPPOSED TO MEAN?!
JACK COULDN'T DO IT, SO WHAT MAKES YOU THINK YOU CAN?
I'M NOT AFRAID OF YOU!
CHOMP
JACK

9
EEYOWCH!
QUICK, JACK! RUN AS FAST AS YOU CAN!
JACK
FEE FI FO FEET! I SMELL SOMETHING SMALL AND GOOD TO EAT!


10
HAVE A BANANA PEEL, YOU BIG FAT SLOB!
HURRY, JANE!
FEE FI FO
OOPF!

BOOM
YOU SAID IT!
AAYYEEE!
THE BIGGER THEY ARE, THE HARDER THEY FALL!

12
HI MOM. HI DAD.
HI JANE. WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN UP TO TODAY?
SHE CLEARED A FIELD AND LIFTED BIG ROCKS!
SHE CLIMBED A BEANSTALK WAY UP INTO THE CLOUDS!
SHE OUTWITTED A GIANT AND SAVED MY LIFE!
WELL, A GIRL LIKE JANE CAN DO ANYTHING!
...EVEN HOMEWORK!
THE END

(14)

MEANWHILE, AT HOME...
GEE, MOM. YOU SURE LIKE TO WORK ON THE CAR!
IT'S FUN!
IN FACT, I'D GET A JOB WORKING ON CARS, BUT I DON'T WANT TO LEAVE YOU ALL ALONE, BECAUSE I LOVE YOU.
I LOVE YOU, TOO, MOM.
HI ELLEN! HI BILLY!
HI DAD!
HARD DAY AT THE OFFICE, DEAR?
YEAH...
...BUT I'LL TELL YOU WHAT. WHILE YOU FIX THE CAR, I'LL FIX DINNER!
GREAT!
AT DINNER.... DAD? IF MOM GOT A JOB WORKING ON CARS, WOULD YOU STAY HOME WITH ME?
I'D LOVE TO!
YOU WOULD???

OF COURSE! I'LL START TOMORROW!
YIPPEE!
NOW I CAN BE A MOM AND A MECHANIC, TOO!
15
THE NEXT MORNING, ELLEN GETS A JOB...
YOU'RE TERRIFIC, MS. FUTURA! YOU'RE HIRED!
WOW!
MEANWHILE, AT HOME....
IT'S ALMOST TIME FOR SCHOOL, BILLY. ARE YOU READY TO GO?
YESSIR. MY BOOKS ARE IN MY BACKPACK.
RRARR
SEE YOU LATER, ALLIGATOR!
IN A WHILE, CROCODILE!
BUT AFTER SCHOOL, BILLY RUNS INTO TROUBLE...
BILLY IS A NERD
BILLY IS A NERD

16

HIS MOM WORKS AND HIS DAD STAYS HOME!
HA HA HA!
WHAT A NERD!
BILLY IS A NERD
BILLY IS A NERD
SHUT UP YOU TURKEYS!
MY MOM AND DAD LIKE THEIR NEW JOBS AND WE'RE A HAPPY FAMILY!
THERE'S NOTHING NERDY ABOUT THAT!
YOU KNOW SOMETHING? ... HE'S RIGHT.
THE END

The Superperson Teacher's Guide

Deanna Chitayat, Ph.D.
Robert A. Miller

To the Teacher:

The purpose of the Superperson Comic Book is to overcome sex-stereotyping in elementary school children by exposing them to new role models in a cartoon format.

These materials are aimed at grades Four and Five, since evidence has shown that efforts to reduce sex-stereotyping should occur before adolescence. Comic books are a popular educational tool that could be used to reduce sex-stereotyping. Finally, current comic books have exposed children to sex-stereotyped situations and characters.

Through role models at home, in school, on television; in books, in fairytales, etc., the child is innundated with the concept that girls are supposed to be nurturant, responsible and obedient, whereas boys are supposed to be self-reliant and achievement-oriented. Children imitate sex-appropriate behavior until that behavior becomes a fixed part of their personality.

The "sex-appropriate" characteristics that society imposes on young children has implications for their future career decision making. The traditional career choices for women have been in those occupations which are associated with a high level of nurturance, obedience and responsibility, e.g., nursing, elementary school teaching, secretarial science, etc. In contrast, males have avoided these occupations which require characteristics that society has taught them belong primarily to females. If we are concerned about the sex-stereotyped career choices made by young people, then we must reach the child before their modeling

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Because of the popularity of comic books, they can have an enormous impact on the attitudes and values of an entire generation of children.

Lesson Plan

Introduction

1. What are some of the comics that are your favorites?

   [The teacher should list on the board several of these.]

2. Let's list on the board what the things are that men do in these comics, and what are the things that women do.

   [The teacher should list on the board several of these roles.]

3. Now we are going to look at some comics which show men and women doing things which may seem different from the men and women we've listed on the board.

The teacher should then pass out the comic. Depending on the class reading level, the class should be instructed to read the stories one at a time, or to read the entire comic before entering into discussion.

COMIC STORY #1: "MAY THE BEST PERSON WIN"

Objectives:

1. To show that girls like mechanical things.
2. To show that girls can solve crisis situations.
3. To show that girls have adventures.
4. To show that girls are interested in competition.

Discussion Questions

1. What was the girl shown as doing in the story?
2. How is that different from the comics you usually read?
3. Do you think girls can be good at mechanical things?
4. Give examples from your own life.

COMIC STORY #2: "JANE AND THE BEANSTALK"

Objectives: To demonstrate the following concepts:

1. Females as well as males have exciting adventures.
2. Females as well as males engage in rugged activity.
3. Girls are brave and self-reliant.
4. Girls have mechanical skills.
5. The action of girls has a direct effect on situation outcomes.

Discussion Questions

1. How is Jane and the Beanstalk different from Jack and the Beanstalk?
2. Why does the farmer think Jane can't do heavy work?
3. How does Jane solve the problem of lifting heavy stones?
4. Why did Jane climb the beanstalk, even though none of the boys were willing to?
5. Why did the giant laugh when he saw a girl?
6. Would you like to have a friend like Jane? Why?

COMIC STORY #3: "THE NEW WAVE ADVENTURES OF THE FUTURA FAMILY"

Objectives:

1. To show that both members of a family might want careers.
2. To show that both men and women love to take care of children.
3. To show that females as well as males can be auto mechanics.
4. To support the concept that men as well as women should have homemaking and career options.
5. To show that personal satisfaction is more important than traditional roles.

Discussion Questions

1. Describe the problem of the Futura family.
2. How did they solve it?

3. Do you know of similar problems in your family or friends? How did they resolve it?

4. How would you respond to someone who says, "Men should do men's jobs and women should do women's jobs."

Appendix I: Anecdotal Report of Field Test

Teacher: Shani Frank

TESTING June 9, 1980 School: St. Rose of Lima

Superperson Comic Book Address: 164th Street & St. Nicholas Avenue

Grade Level: 5th Grade Bronx, New York

The class was comprised of five girls. Of these, two were considered by the teacher to be above average, one was slow, and the other two were termed average. Two of the girls were black, one was Puerto Rican, and two were white.

The story tested was "May the Best Person Win." Everyone understood the basic story, that the girl, Celia, had proved that she could race, and that, in fact, her resourcefullness saved the day.

The reading level was not too high, except for three words: tough, contestant, and the protagonist's name, Celia.

They felt that she didn't look like a girl, and that she should have been prettier.

When asked if women can do things that are usually done by boys or men, they all said yes. It seemed they had been thinking about this or discussing it in earlier classes.

Shani Frank, the teacher, had them read it aloud -- each girl read a different frame. This seemed to work, and they got through the story in about fifteen minutes. They understood the use of the block and tackle ("like a pully,")said one girl, and theyunderstood that although Celia hadn't won the race, she got the trophy because she had saved Joe's life and that he was very grateful.

When asked "Do you think girls can be in races, too?", they said very strongly, "Yes, cause girls got heads."

Two girls came in late, and instead of reading it aloud, they read it silently. They seemed to understand the story.

Shani Frank, the teacher, pretty much followed the sequence of questions in the Guide, and they seemed to work.

The idea of having the class read it aloud was a good one, and in fact it might be a good idea in a larger class to give out the parts and to have students play act the story.